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ORTHODOXY

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ORTHODOXY

THE IMPOSSIBLE BOY

IN SEARCH OF ARCADY

ORTHODOXY

by NINA WILCOX PUTNAM



NEW YORK
MITCHELL KENNERLEY
1914

To
J. H. H.

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G.H.
Publisher

DEC 4 1914

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CHARACTERS

THE SEXTON	THE TENOR
THE ANCIENT WOMAN	THE CONTRALTO
THE MINISTER'S WIFE	THE CHORUS
THE LAND AGENT	FIRST FARMHAND
THE AGENT'S WIFE	SECOND FARMHAND
THE BUTCHER	A WORTHY CITIZEN
THE BUTCHER'S WIFE	THE RICH BACHELOR
FIRST GIRL	THE OLD MAID
SECOND GIRL	THE MINISTER
THIRD GIRL	THE GREAT GOD PAN
FIRST YOUTH	THE IDIOT
SECOND YOUTH	THE IDIOT'S MOTHER
THIRD YOUTH	THE CHOIR
THE BASSO	THE ORGANIST
THE SOPRANO	THE STRANGER

Note

It must be thoroughly realized that the characters of this play are intended to give voice to their actual, private thought of the moment; but are intended to do so in the usual tone and manner of polite conventionality. Their gestures and voices must be those of people under perfectly normal conditions, and everything done to stimulate realization by the audience of the fact that it is the secret minds of the characters which are being portrayed. They, the characters, are simply saying what they are really thinking in the situation in which they are presented, instead of employing the empty social forms which we are accustomed to hearing people actually give voice to.

AUTHOR'S PREFACE

There has always been a peculiar fascination for me in the realization that while people were saying one thing, they were almost invariably thinking another. In certain circumstances we all realize this to be true, as in formal greetings and the expression of social amenities; and we read through the convenient form with comparative ease. A great deal of the time, however, we have to dodge about among the deliberately misleading words used by those with whom we come in contact, seeking here and there to find their real meaning, and this is a confusing and tiring task: one of those vicarious expenditures of energy of which the world has altogether too many. Words are themselves pitfalls of misunderstanding. To each of us their meaning varies slightly in all but the simplest forms, and even these may readily be applied with totally different significance. As for the confusion which intonation puts upon the spoken word, differentiating

it from the same word when written, and the mistaken interpretations resulting therefrom, I need say nothing, as they are too widely acknowledged to need further comment. Bergson, the eminent French philosopher, points out that it is almost impossible really to convey anything through so clumsy a medium as language: and the experiment of asking a group of people to define the meaning of a simple word like "quite," for instance, will convince anyone of the truth of this.

Now granting that under the best of circumstances it is difficult for us to understand each other, why is it not indeed a wasteful thing to expend good energy on further disguise of our own thoughts? It is infinitely easier to be as direct as words permit, and the resulting reaction upon one's acquaintance is intensely interesting.

However far we may be from this ideal of genuinely frank intercourse between humans, if we possess the least curiosity about the actual foundations upon which other people's lives are grounded, we can never cease from seeking to discover, or at least to guess, what

is actually passing in their minds as their lips move over some empty formula—even when the formula is empty only from a familiarity which has brought it into contempt, and could and should be full of most poignant meaning, as in the case of the (omitted) sacred service in my play.

For of all places in which to look for feeling which rings high, and words holding true meaning, a church is the most likely. And yet it was my childish observation of those who sat around me in the bare white church to which my grandmother took me as a little girl, that inspired my writing of what I hold to be in no way a sacrilegious play. In those long hours when I sat in the red cushioned pew, my feet dangling over its edge, quick with restrained energy, my eyes fixed upon the bit of sky beyond the tall windows over the clergyman's head; in those long hours I knew that I was not thinking of the words I repeated so mechanically; and by a thousand tokens I knew that *the others about me were not doing so either!* In every way they betrayed themselves—there was no ecstasy upon their faces,

they were infinitely more conscious of their neighbors' clothes than of the minister's words. For years I watched them, these smug, comfortable congregations, who had no conception of the wonder and stupendous import of the service through which they sat so calmly, and hastened forth from, with gossip hot upon their lips. And then the notion came to me to write out all that I guessed to be the truth about them. All that I felt artistically *certain* was the truth: to put into the mouths of the congregation the things I guessed they were thinking. I do not say that I *knew* they were thinking so, for a positive statement is a pit-fall for truth. But I guessed at it with that same conviction of having hit it right with which one looks into the utterly bored face of a departing guest and guesses that his "such a delightful time" means "I have had a hateful time." And so I have put down the service as I heard it with my every instinct when I was a child: and as I guessed it with my mind as an adult.

I do not wish to convey, however, that I believe that there are no really good people in

churches. The *Contralto*, who hears the voice of *Pan*, is a "good" woman, because she is real. Therefore she can hear *Pan*. But like most real people she is frankly groping as far as her religious feeling goes. She knows that it makes her happy to sing, and to give her copper to the poor, and that both things pertain to religion: she knows, too, that the voice of *Pan*, the earthly god whose hoofs are pungent of meadow loam, and who speaks to the ears of youth, and sets the good flesh a-tingle, can be heard in churches, and that there is nothing incongruous in the fact: also she is sufficiently well-balanced to hear him, but not to lose sanity, and so see him. Alas! she is typical, I fear, of the minority, in which I have put her!

I have intended no propaganda in the play, save that which you may deduce from it yourself, if you so wish. Make your own interpretations (as indeed you will without my telling you to). I have simply been curious: and this is the result of my exploration.

N. W. P.

Orthodoxy

A Play in One Act

NINA WILCOX PUTNAM

Scene: The interior of a church. The audience sees a half-section of the building as though it had been cut lengthwise through the near side of the centre aisle, leaving it intact and running parallel with and immediately behind the footlights. As the entire width of the aisle is shown, the platform with reading-desk and minister's seat stands complete beneath a sort of proscenium arch. Below the reading-desk, upon which is an enormous Bible, and occupying the end of the aisle-carpet, is the communion table, with mottled marble top and hideous carved legs of walnut. Below this, and extending to the aisle, are other pews with doors, facing the pulpit in the usual manner.

The woodwork is white-painted and the pews cushioned in crimson, while the walls are stencilled in imitation of carved mouldings. Through the row of long, undecorated windows at the rear the sun is shining gaily, and a glimpse of blue sky and waving trees may be had. At the right is the organ-loft, shown sectionally, and beneath this is the entrance to the church. At rise of curtain the Sexton is discovered tidying the church with a last few touches: closing the doors of one or two pews, making sure that there are hymn-books in the racks and finally giving the contribution plate a brush with his pocket-handkerchief. He is a dyspeptic-looking man of perhaps forty years of age, whose chin recedes timidly into the enormous folds of a ready-made four-in-hand tie. His ill-fitting frock coat hangs loosely, but for all that he has an air of complacent self-importance. The church-bell is ringing.

THE SEXTON

They will all look at me as they come in. I'm important on Sundays, anyhow. What a sense of consequence it gives me to bustle

✓

about, getting things ready! That's what I get out of this job! The stipend is nothing, the sentiment is nothing: but I put on these clothes and they all look at me, whereas they would do nothing of the sort otherwise.

. . . Now I must go and stand by the door and show them to their seats, as they arrive. . . . I wonder if the town-clerk will wear the shoes I made for him! Confound him, I wish he would pay for them!

[He goes to the entrance door and opens it, letting in a patch of sunlight and disclosing the steps of the building and a bit of view.

He takes up his stand just inside, facing the audience, and adjusts his clothes self-consciously. A strange, wild laugh is heard, but the Sexton seems not to hear it. Presently the Very Ancient Woman enters. She is bent nearly double and walks with a stick.

She is slightly palsied and her thin, wrinkled face is clear and calm. She is the very picture of ancient piety. The Sexton accom-

panies her, and each principal who enters thereafter, to their pews, with a courtesy of manner which utterly contradicts his lan-

guage. Their manner is also a contradiction to their words]

THE SEXTON

Well, old crone! What a nuisance it is to have to assist your doddering footsteps up the aisle every Sunday!

THE ANCIENT WOMAN

Thank goodness I am the first! Last Sunday the butcher's wife got here before me, and so I missed seeing her come in. But to-day I'll miss no one.

THE SEXTON [*assisting her into a pew*]

Old stupid! Tuck your skirt in, can't you?

THE ANCIENT WOMAN [*gazing around with an air of satisfaction*]

This is fine! So much better than staying at home alone. I would not miss it for worlds! [*The Minister's Wife enters with two small girl children, one on either hand. She ex-*

changes a surreptitious bow with the Sexton and hurries to a front pew]

THE MINISTER'S WIFE [*as she goes down the aisle*]

Oh, I hope the roast will not burn while I am gone! That wretched stove! My garter hurts. Shall I be able to adjust it, I wonder? No! Some one might see: I shall have to sit in misery. The whole congregation will watch me; but no matter how I act, they will talk about it afterward. . . . If only the children will be quiet! I will pray for that. [*She enters the pew and kneels, burying her face in her hands, while the little girls sit staring about, round-eyed*]

THE SEXTON [*returning to door*]

Poor woman, what a silly face she has!

[*Enter the Land Agent and his Wife*]

THE LAND AGENT [*to the Sexton*]

If this were the place to talk about such things I would tell you that I am going to evict you to-morrow. ✓

THE SEXTON

How you glare at me, sir! Positively, I am tempted to rob the plate in order to pay you!

THE AGENT'S WIFE

I have on a new hat.

[The laugh rings out again, but no one heeds]

THE SEXTON *[smiling politely]*

Here is your pew. I wish its floor would collapse and drop you both through.

THE AGENT'S WIFE

I have on a new hat! *[She kneels and continues repeating the sentence softly for a moment]*

[Enter the Butcher and his Wife]

THE BUTCHER

Thank fortune, the All-pervading Power, if there really is any such, cannot possibly know about that overcharge I made. He ✓

will only see the fine waistcoat which I
bought with it!

THE BUTCHER'S WIFE

How religious I look! It is so respectable
to go to church with one's husband!

THE ANCIENT WOMAN

She has on her last summer's gown!

THE SEXTON [*to the butcher, genially*]

I'll beat you at pinochle yet, old man!
[*Enter three Young Girls*]

FIRST GIRL

See my new hat, see my new hat! It has
pink, pink roses upon it.

SECOND GIRL

Her hat is not any better than my shoes.
Look at my shoes.

THIRD GIRL

He has not come as yet!

THE SEXTON [*shows them a seat*]

Here, you charming things! How plump the eldest is: I would like to pinch her.

THIRD GIRL [*kneeling*]

How the sexton smells of pomade: he sickens me. When will my beloved come!

FIRST GIRL [*kneeling*]

My new hat, see my new hat, see it, see it!

SECOND GIRL [*kneeling*]

My shoes, my shoes! They hurt, but see how white they are.

[The church fills more rapidly now, with a crowd of country folk. The named Characters come in, forward, along the outer edge of the aisle. The gallery begins to fill]

[Enter two Youths]

THE SEXTON

Louts! You can find your own places!

THIRD GIRL

It is he! Will he not look at me?

FIRST YOUTH

There is the grocer's daughter. How she stares! I wish she would stop it, for she makes me uneasy. Now if it were the young matron yonder, who looked at me once with soft eyes. . . .

SECOND YOUTH

The grocer's daughter will not look at me.
Alas!

[Enter Third Youth]

THIRD YOUTH

How my shirt scratches me, how my shirt scratches me!

[Kneels, repeating]

[The Organist begins to play very softly, and the Choir straggle in and take their places]

THE BASSO

If you don't keep on the key this morning,
Miss Soprano, I shall go mad!

THE SOPRANO

You have a wretched ear for music!

THE CHORUS [*tittering*]

We are really as good as they, the conceited things!

THE TENOR

This choir would go all to pieces if it were not for me. At least I must contrive to keep them thinking so.

THE CONTRALTO

Oh, the music, the music! Once a week at least I can sing to the organ. How glad I am—how glad I am to sing!

[The laugh rings out again, and at the sound of it the Contralto smiles and hums over her part under her breath. No one else heeds]
[Enter two Farmhands]

FIRST FARMHAND

I don't really know what it is all about, but let us sit down.

SECOND FARMHAND

No more do I understand it; but it's very respectable.

[Enter a Worthy Citizen and his Wife, together with a Rich Bachelor. They talk as they walk up the aisle and become seated in the same pew]

THE WORTHY CITIZEN *[to the Rich Bachelor]*

Our business is going well, friend, and not the less so because we show ourselves regularly in this House!

THE RICH BACHELOR

Yes, yes! And how fine it is to know that as we walk up here, everyone is looking and whispering, and wondering how much money we really have! *[He kneels and murmurs]*
I hope dinner will be on time to-day.

THE SEXTON

I will bow obsequiously to you, and perhaps you will lend me the money that will save me from eviction! I hope you are seated comfortably!

[Enter the Old Maid]

THE OLD MAID *[hurrying primly to a front pew]*

Will the men look at me as I pass? Ah! There is no desire in their eyes. [*Kneels in her pew*] I am a-weary, blowing on cold ashes!

THE SEXTON

Ah! She was a wild one when I was a boy, the slut! The village never found her out, though!

[*Enter a Common Woman with her son, the village Idiot. They seat themselves midway down the aisle, in direct line with one of the gaunt windows, the sash of which is half open. During the scene which follows, the Idiot keeps staring at this window, where presently appears the Great God Pan. Pan it is who has been laughing, and he seats himself upon the sill, where he and the Idiot can see each other. They talk on terms of old intimacy, using many gestures, and are entirely oblivious to everything save each other. No one but the Idiot sees Pan or hears what he says, nor what the Idiot says to him. When the Idiot speaks to Pan, his language is intelligible. When he replies to*

his mother's rebuke, he is able to make nothing but a terrible, meaningless sound in his throat. The Contralto, in the organ loft, seems to realize Pan is present, but she cannot see him. The tolling of the bell ceases, and the Minister, a smug young man in a white stock, walks briskly up the aisle, a Bible under his arm]

THE MINISTER

Ah! They can never begin without Me! I am the whole show, here! It is really a very desirable job, mine!

[He goes to the platform, mounts the steps and, standing behind the reading-desk, half closes his eyes, stretching out his hands to the Congregation, who lean forward in prayer]

THE MINISTER *[as though praying]*

Lean forward uncomfortably now, all of you, and listen, or don't listen, exactly as you like. But do steal a covert look at me, as I stand here in this picturesque and sanctified attitude. Here we are, gathered together in

this house, and I can't think of a single original thing to say, try as I will. I am going to be very dull, I know, but it gives me a sort of pleasant sense of importance to be doing it, and it will be over in about an hour, and then we will all be at liberty to go our several ways. Amen!

[During the dialogue between Pan and the Idiot, the Minister and the congregation go on with the motions of the service]

THE IDIOT *[to Pan]*

Hello! Won't you come in?

PAN

It is warmer here in the sunlight.

THE IDIOT

I will come out to you presently. Can you see the ocean from there?

PAN

Yes. I was down upon the sands early this morning and saw. . . .

[His voice is lost in the sound of the Con-

gregation singing, although the two are seen to go on talking unconcernedly. The Congregation has arisen and sings:

Praise Gold from which all blessings flow,
Praise it ye creatures here below;
Praise it all ye Heavenly Hosts,
Slave for gold till ye give up your ghosts!
[*The Congregation resumes its seats*]

PAN

. . . and the leaves all caressed each other and laughed for love of it!

THE IDIOT

And did the south wind *never* come back?

PAN

O yes! The south wind it was that played about the barren branches this very spring, coaxing the young leaves to come out again. She and the sun, you know, are lovers, and I will tell you a story about them, which a famous Greek historian, who was my good friend, wrote. You see it came about thus.
. . . [*Pan's voice is drowned out by that of the Minister*]

THE MINISTER

We will now read the ninth selection of the psalter, page one hundred and twenty. The ninth selection.

My son, forget not my law: but let thine heart keep my commandments.

THE CONGREGATION

For length of days, and long life and peace, shall they add to thee.

THE MINISTER

Let not cunning and deceit forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the tablets of thy heart.

THE CONGREGATION

So shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of man.

THE MINISTER

Trust in Gold with all thy heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.

THE CONGREGATION

In all ways acknowledge Gold, and it shall direct thy paths.

THE MINISTER

Be wise in thine own eyes; fear Good and depend on evil.

THE CONGREGATION

It shall be health to thy navel and marrow to thy bones.

THE MINISTER

Honor Success with thy substance, and with the first fruits of all thine increase.

THE CONGREGATION

So shall thy barrels be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

THE MINISTER

Happy is the man that findeth cunning and getteth unscrupulous.

THE CONGREGATION

For the merchandise of it is begotten of the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof, fine gold.

PAN

. . . And there they lay upon the bank of scented ferns, until her sister, the west wind, drew away the grey curtain of night, while Mrs. Aurora extinguished the stars, one by one, and raised her flaming shield against the eastern horizon!

THE IDIOT

A lovely story, that! But who is Mrs. Aurora?

PAN

A light lady of my acquaintance, much given to chariot-racing, I regret to say. A noisy party, not scrupling to awaken sleepers!

THE IDIOT

Tell me about her.

PAN

Some other day. Is not one story sufficient for one morning?

THE IDIOT

Well, it was a beautiful story! I will repeat it to the rivulets on the hillside, that they

may babble it over, and have it memorized in time to tell it to the sea, when they shall reach it!

PAN

Hast seen those young robins yet—the ones of which I told you? Your tutoring would help them learn to fly. Be sure now that this afternoon you go. . . .

THE MINISTER

We will now rise and unite as nearly as possible in singing hymn number five hundred and fifteen. Hymn number five hundred and fifteen.

THE CONGREGATION [*sings*]

The Church's one foundation

Has long been lost to sight,

It now is the creation

Of greed, convention, fright.

From honest superstition,

Full long we have been free,

But still we must maintain

Re-spec-ta-bil-i-ty!

Amen!

THE IDIOT [*clapping his hands loudly, and jumping up and down with glee at some suggestion of Pan's*]

That will be fine! And afterward, we will dance!

THE IDIOT'S MOTHER [*shaking him by the shoulder*]

Stop staring and mouthing at that window! [*The Idiot makes a terrible, inarticulate sound in reply to her. It is evident that he cannot talk to humans*]

THE MINISTER

The lesson for to-day will be found in the third verse of the thirty-second chapter of the book of Exodus. "And all the people brake off the golden earrings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron. And he received them at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, after he had made it a molten calf: and they said, these be thy Gods, O Israel. . . ."

THE IDIOT [*together with Pan*]

O joy! O joy!

THE IDIOT'S MOTHER [*angry*]

Shut up, can't you! This is no place for such things!

[*The Idiot repeats his inarticulate noise*]

PAN

As I was about to remark. . . .

THE MINISTER

Let us pray! Oh, darn it all! I have to make this prayer longer than the first! I have to talk on and on and on and on for twenty minutes. If I talk less, I'll hear of it from the deacons. On and on and on and on! One eye on the clock, though both eyes appear shut! On and on! Is the time up yet? No! Two minutes more! On and on and on! Just filling the time with meaningless words. Ah! Time's up! . . .

and hear us as we say [*the Congregation joins him*] Our Father, who art a safe distance away in a hypothetical place called Heaven, give us this day our daily bread and all the other things we want: give us, give us, give us, give, give, give! Amen!

PAN [*laughs loudly*]

You have hit it right! The interesting things in life are the difficult ones—and to prove it, this very afternoon we will hang garlands on the guinea-pigs' tails, shoe the snakes' feet, and make a portrait of the wind!

THE IDIOT

Won't that be clever of us? And useful, too!

THE MINISTER

The notices for the week are as follows. On Tuesday evening at half past seven, the Mothers' Meeting will take place. It will be attended chiefly by old maids, as usual. Wednesday evening, the Missionary Society will meet in the chapel, as heretofore. Mr. O. Phool will speak about the vital necessity of neglecting our own slums entirely, and sending out a few more or less illiterate men and women to try and uproot the ancient philosophic religion of China. All are welcome. On Thursday evening the usual

bluff, very similar to this present one, will be held in the chapel. Our neighbor, the church in the next town, extends a well-calculated invitation to the members of this congregation to attend the unveiling of a perfectly ridiculous monument which they have erected in memory of the late Bishop of this diocese. They hope all of you will come and help make a good crowd. The Sunday morning Institution for Befogging the Minds of the Young will take place in the basement of this church immediately after this service. All are welcome to stay and gloat over it. You will now be fleeced of the usual money in the usual fashion. I hope you will all contribute generously. Inasmuch as my salary comes out of it, this is always a rather anxious and embarrassing time for me. So I will retire behind the desk and try to look unconscious.

[The Minister seats himself. The organ plays softly, and the Sexton, taking the plate from the communion-table, passes it along the aisle. The Congregation speak as they drop in their offerings]

THE ANCIENT WOMAN

My usual small bit. The show is worth it!

THE MINISTER'S WIFE

My copper, for appearance sake. Oh, that roast of beef in the oven at home!

THE LAND AGENT

Half a dollar, or they will think my business is failing!

THE SEXTON

Stingy!

THE BUTCHER

A part of that over-charge, just in case.
. . . it will ease my mind.

FIRST YOUNG GIRL

See what a dainty hand I have!

SECOND YOUNG GIRL

I hope that he whom I love sees how generously I give!

THIRD YOUNG GIRL

I had far rather buy a ribbon with it!

THE SEXTON [*turning from them with a critical air*]

The eldest is not so attractive after all: she has a pimple on her chin!

FIRST YOUTH

I will put in nothing, for my friend here is going to put in two coins, and if I make the motions of contributing, no one but the sexton will know. . . .

[*Second Youth contributes*]

THIRD YOUTH

I would not give this were it not that I still have enough to buy a drink with later!

THE BASSO [*to the Soprano, who apparently agrees with him*]

We are lucky to escape that. They don't pass the plate up here!

THE CONTRALTO [*to herself*]

I will keep my little coin to drop in the poor-box as I go out.

[*Pan laughs and she smiles at him, not seeing, but only hearing him*]

FIRST FARMHAND

It's cruel to make us give up part of a hard-earned wage for this!

THE RICH BACHELOR

This gives me pride! I am sure no one else will give as much as I do!

[*The Idiot repeats his inarticulate sound*]

HIS MOTHER

Shut up! Don't disgrace me just as I'm giving a decent bit of money to the plate!

THE OLD MAID

I will fumble with my purse as long as possible, that you may be obliged to stand near, man!

THE SEXTON

Ugh! There is a vile odor of peppermint about you. [*Turning away with the plate, and looking the coins over furtively*]

Bah! A wretched collection! But see how magnificently I will march up the aisle with it!

[*The Sexton retires*]

PAN

Yes, dear comrade, with pleasure! Here is a handful of fresh air for you! [*He makes a gesture of tossing. A breeze blows in*]

THE IDIOT

Thanks! I drink your health with it!

THE MINISTER

Let us try to sing in the same time and key, the hymn number five hundred and twenty-four. Hymn number five hundred and twenty-four!

THE CONGREGATION [*sings*]

From Greenland's icy mountains
To India's coral strand,
Where Afric's sunny fountains
Roll down their golden sand,
From every ancient city
From modern town or old,
We hear the single cry of
"O let us work for gold!"

Amen!

THE IDIOT

I sing, I sing! [*Repeats his inarticulate sound*]

HIS MOTHER

Be still, fool!

PAN

I laugh! Ha! Ha!

[*The Idiot and Pan laugh together*]

THE MINISTER

My text for to-day will be found in the third verse of the sixth chapter of St. Matthew: "Let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth." I use this text because it is a popular one: one which we are all pretty well in sympathy with, and live by, conscientiously, rather than because it has anything so very much to do with my sermon. However, that is of little importance, for it is possible to twist any text into any desired meaning: indeed its breadth of meaning is dependent only upon the wit of the minister, and if I was quicker of wit, you would

not stand for what I would then wish to preach. Neither, my brethren, would I be here in this stupid little town: I'd be in a swell church in a big city, where the women would make me really valuable presents! Well, I suppose I'd better get back to the text, although, of course, it's much more amusing to me to talk about myself. "Let not thy right hand know what thy left hand doeth!" Reflect, dear friends, on the beauty of that thought—on its practical common sense! We all know how desirable is the ability to fool ourselves, and how comparatively few of us have attained perfection in that art. But we can—if we strive earnestly—we can *all* acquire the habit of fooling ourselves part of the time: in other words, we can do one thing with one hand, and actually blind ourselves as to what we are doing with the other, even though it counteracts the first action entirely! We can beam kindly on our neighbor and lend him money at usury, and then give instructions to a secret partner to foreclose on that neighbor at the earliest opportunity. How sim-

ple. Yet the application of this great maxim—"Let not thy right hand know"—can be made even more simple and direct. We can, for example, shake hands with a man with our right hand, and abstract his watch with our left! In this case, plainly, our hands are doing exactly opposite things. Your innocent right hand, and your equally innocent left, are blameless because you have stood between them, obeying the precept of the great author of our text! Never, my friends, my brethren, never believe but that you can live in accordance with the teachings of the great prophets and, more especially, by the examples set forth in the book of books! Think not that all the examples set forth therein are too difficult for modern humanity to attain! It is not so, my brethren, it is not so! Did not David steal his neighbor's wife? He did! And who was it got a vineyard by a false foreclosure, but his son? Can not this sort of thing be done to-day? It can, my brethren, it can, if you will but try hard enough! And many villainies beside, all of which you can justify,

if you will, by precedent in the book of books! Try it, my friends—try it, I beg of you. Strive earnestly, and you will find that you can do pretty nearly anything and get away with it, provided you come here regularly, and so, keep my job going for me. Remember, that if you are sufficiently orthodox, the Bible is infallible. Whether you live by the first half of it or by the second, is really of no importance to the church. You must simply acknowledge its infallibility, and then choose your half. I advise the older part. The Bible is infallible. You believe in it: therefore you are orthodox. The Bible is infallible, but it is contradictory. So is infallibility. Infallibly so! So perhaps contradiction is infallible.

Now that I have given you a sermon which you did not feel obliged to listen to (in accordance with the terms of my contract) instead of what I would like to say, I will stop. If you really knew what I honestly believe, you would be astonished. But it is better for you to remain in ignorance, and better for me. Indeed, a slightly altered

form of to-day's text would fit me admirably.
"Let not thy right mind know what thy
wrong is doing, lest you go mad!" [*He
closes his eyes and stretches out his hands*]
And now one short prayer more. This is the
last, thank fortune, and the least difficult.
I'll just say a word or two further. That
will do. Amen!

[*The Choir sings alone, the Congregation
standing*]

THE CHOIR [*sings*]

Praise to the leading social light,
And to the rich sing praise:
But most of all let's praise ourselves,
No matter what our ways.

Amen!

[*Tune, dox. 566*]

THE MINISTER [*with outstretched hands*]

Let us go to dinner! Amen!

[*The instant the Minister stops speaking,
the Congregation begins to bustle out, most
indecorously, all talking at once*]

PAN [*above the din of talk*]

Meet you at the door, comrade! Ha! ha! ha! ha! [*He leaps down and disappears*]
[*The Idiot rushes off from his mother, un-reproved. Gradually the crowd thins out, with characteristic action on the part of the named characters, until there is no one left except the Sexton, who is busy with the collection-plate, by the pulpit. A wait. Then, into the vivid patch of sunlight at the open door, there steps the ragged form of a Stranger. He is young, but bearded, and wears a voluminous cloak of rough material. He is bare-footed, bare-headed, and carries a long staff like a shepherd's crook. The sun is vivid behind his golden head*]

THE STRANGER [*entering only as far as the doorsill*]

What a fine place this is!

THE SEXTON [*putting the collection money into his pocket and hurrying down the aisle in a fine rage at sight of the shabby intruder*]

Yes, a very fine and expensive building. But you will have to get out. I am closing up!

THE STRANGER [*retreats a trifle before the rough gesture of the Sexton*]

Closing so fine and large a house! Is it left empty, then?

THE SEXTON

All the week. Why not?

THE STRANGER

Empty all through the week! Then perhaps I can find lodging here!

THE SEXTON

Ha! ha! *Lodging here!* Ho! ho! That's a good one! [*They step out on to the porch, the Sexton pushing out the Stranger*] Lodging. Oh! ha! ha! Don't you recognize this place, don't you know what place this is?

THE STRANGER

What strange place is it?

THE SEXTON

Why, you idiot! It is the house of God!

[He shuts the door with a bang, closing himself and the Stranger out. The key is heard to turn in the lock, raspingly]

CURTAIN



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